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## DAVIDSON'S BOOK OF JOB.\*

The writers on "Job" have been legion ; and every writer presents a different theory as to the authorship, idea and purpose of that book, from every other writer. Who shall decide this matter ? Whom shall we believe ? Not many of us are capable of formulating a theory of our own. We must, for the most part, choose between theories already proposed. The writer of this notice would urge those who have not fully decided all the questions which have been suggested through the ages, concerning the person, time, character, etc., etc., of this great patriarch, to give a careful study to the views set forth by Prof. Davidson. No scholar of modern times, or for that matter of ancient times, has given more exhaustive study to this book than has our author. That he has "touched bottom" is our firm belief ; and the book, as interpreted by him, has a wider, deeper, and clearer meaning for us than it ever had before. The key, here given us, unlocks many, if not all, of the heretofore hidden mysteries of this book.

The Introduction is a wonderful example of clearness, exhaustiveness and condensation. The purpose of the book is in our author's own language as follows :

"It was the author's purpose to widen men's views of God's providence, and to set before them a new view of suffering. With great skill he employs Job as his instrument to clear the ground of the old theories, and he himself brings forward in their place his new truth, that sufferings may befall the innocent, and be not a chastisement for their sins but a trial of their righteousness. This may be considered one great purpose of the book. This purpose, however, was in all probability no mere theoretical one, but subordinate to some wider practical design. No Hebrew writer is merely a poet or thinker. He is always a teacher. He has men before him in their relations to God. And it is not usually men in their individual relations, but as members of the family of Israel, the people of God. It is consequently scarcely to be doubted that the book has a national scope. The author considered his new truth regarding the meaning of affliction as of national interest, and to be the truth needful to comfort and uphold the heart of his people in the circumstances in which they were.

"But the direct teaching of the book is only half its contents. It presents also a history—deep and inexplicable affliction, a great moral struggle and a victory. Must not this history also be designed to teach ? Is it not a kind of analogue the purpose of which is to inspire new conduct, new faith, and new hopes ? In Job's sufferings undeserved and inexplicable to him, yet capable of an explanation most consistent with the goodness and faithfulness of God, and casting honor upon his faithful servants ; in his despair bordering upon apostasy, at last overcome ; in the higher knowledge of God and deeper humility to which he attained, and in the happy issue of his afflictions—in all these Israel may see itself, and from the sight take courage, and forecast its own history. What the author sets before his people is a new reading of their history, just as another new reading is set before them by the prophet in the latter part of Isaiah. The two readings are different, but both speak to the heart of the people. Job, however, is scarcely to

\* THE BOOK OF JOB, with Notes, Introduction and Appendix. By the Rev. A. B. Davidson, D. D., LL. D., Professor of Hebrew and Old Testament Exegesis in the New College, Edinburgh. Cambridge: The University Press. New York: Macmillan & Co. Chicago: A. S. McClurg & Co. 12mo, pp. lxviii, 300.

be considered Israel, under a feigned name. He is not Israel, though Israel may see itself and its history reflected in him. It is the elements of reality in his history common to him with Israel in affliction, common even to him with humanity as a whole, confined within the straitened limits set by its own ignorance; wounded to death by the mysterious sorrows of life; tortured by the uncertainty whether its cry finds an entrance into God's ear; alarmed and paralysed by the irreconcilable discrepancies which it discovers between its necessary thoughts of Him and its experience of Him in his providence; and faint with longing that it might come unto his place, and behold him not girt with his majesty but in human form, as one looketh upon his fellow—it is these elements of truth that make the history of Job instructive to the people of Israel in the times of affliction when it was set before them, and to men in all ages."

This being the purpose of the book, who was its author? We may only indicate with extreme brevity a few of the author's ideas. A distinction must be made between the age of the *character* Job, and the age of the book. The *character* is a patriarchal one, as appears from the archaic terms placed in his mouth, the fact that his riches consist of cattle and flocks, that he is a priest and offers sacrifice, that his age is so great, that many archaeological and historical allusions to the patriarchal time are found. The *author*, however, lived at a late date, for the language often betrays a familiarity with the law, it contains references to pledges and landmarks, it alludes to judicial procedure against sun- and moon-worship, and against adultery.

"The book is the genuine outcome of the religious life and thought of Israel, the product of a religious knowledge and experience possible among no other people." Its date is between the fall of the Northern Kingdom and the return from the Captivity. Probabilities point to the time of the Captivity as the date to which the book is to be assigned. Job and the Servant of Jehovah in Isa. XL.-LXVI. are to be compared. "Both are innocent sufferers (Job 1., 8, Isa. LIII., 11); both are afflicted in a way that strikes horror into the beholders, and causes them to deem them smitten of God; both are forsaken of men, and subjected to mocking and spitting; both are restored and glorified, and receive 'double,' as they both continued faithful;" and so many other similarities might be cited. Perhaps Job is the type of the righteous individual sufferer or of the class of individuals; and the servant that of the suffering righteous Israel.

Our aim has been, merely to place the main theory of the writer before our readers. In so limited space we may not have succeeded. Sufficient, however, has been given, to show that the treatise under notice is one book in ten thousand, and worthy of the most considerate study of every devout lover of Bible truth.